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ABSTRACT

This booklet reviews historical, social, and developmental information about young black males as well as strategies for change and examples of successful programs. The text is based on a 1-day conference on at-risk young black men. The first section sketches the conditions of inner-city black families from the earlier decades of the century to the present. The report then addresses the nature of adolescence and the black adolescent male in particular. The struggle for self-definition is the subject of the following section, which notes that young black males often have their identities defined for them or fail to see any positive role models. A discussion of the importance of the parental role at different developmental stages leads to a discussion of the early childhood years and elements that distinguish young blacks from young non-blacks. Racial pride, its expression when individuals surpass stereotypical limits, and the definition of success are considered. Broad strategies for taking action are proposed. The following examples of effective interventions are presented: (1) the Yale Child Study Center School Development Program; (2) "The Door"; (3) Project SPIRIT; and (4) the Black Family Roundtable in New Haven. Appendix A provides the meeting agenda. Appendix B presents a list of meeting participants. (JB)

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Young Black Males in Jeopardy

Risk Factors and Intervention Strategies

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Young Black Males in Jeopardy: Risk Factors and Intervention Strategies

Report of Meeting Held at
Carnegie Corporation of New York

February 11, 1988

By Alex Poinsett

Carnegie Corporation of New York is a philanthropic foundation that was created by Andrew Carnegie in 1911 to "promote the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding among the people of the United States." Subsequently, its charter was amended to permit the use of funds for the same purposes in certain countries that are or have been members of the British overseas Commonwealth.

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Young Black Males in Jeopardy: Risk Factors and Intervention Strategies

Too many black male adolescents are destroying themselves, warn concerned social scientists. Dying disproportionately from homicide (their major killer), suicide (tripled since 1960), and drug abuse (endemic), their risk-taking behavior often mimics reckless daredevils courting disaster. Inner-city black males are overrepresented among high school dropouts and underrepresented on college campuses. Burdened with an unemployment rate that is three times higher than it was in 1960, they fill the lowest civilian and military jobs. Detractors claim they lack self-esteem, loathe the work ethic, and generally are social leeches. But University of California associate professor Jewelle Taylor Gibbs believes poverty, racism, family disintegration, and community disorganization more accurately account for the precarious plight of young black males.

That perspective informed the remarks of David A. Hamburg, president of Carnegie Corporation of New York, as he launched an intensive, day-long conference on these at-risk young men. Hamburg focused explicitly on male adolescent problems that he pointed out have been neglected far too long. "You can at least get some feel for why it is that these kids seem to have such a low perception of opportunity, weak social support networks, and low emphasis on education and health," he said. "When you look at the handicaps, obstacles, and loads that they have to carry, it provides a most fundamental challenge."

Hamburg urged his fellow conferees to arrive at a consensus on strategies for intervention — an action plan — that both research evidence and well-considered "street" experience indicate are not only doable but also would increase the likelihood that black male adolescents will grow up whole. He cautioned the group to avoid setting up a hypothetical ideal, since as he put it, "The perfect can be the enemy of the good." Far from being just another quick fix, he said, any well-considered action plan must extend over years and require support from federal and state governments, the business community, and foundations.

Historical Overview of Black Families in America

James P. Comer, professor of child psychiatry at Yale University, who chaired the meeting, sketched the conditions of inner-city black families and children. He pictured a black community that functioned reasonably well until the 1950s, when only 22 percent of black families were headed

by single parents. As education became a major prerequisite for obtaining living-wage jobs during that decade, however, many black families began to falter. Comer attributed their decline to a number of interlocking factors, in particular the traumatic social history of blacks, accelerating change in technology and the economy, and adaptive mechanisms that were available to some but not all.

Comer dismissed what he believes are uninformed and unfair comparisons between the historical experience of blacks and that of white and Asian immigrants. "Immigrant communities, although they had hardships, also had cultural continuity," he explained. "They often came from the same place in the old country and settled in the same place in the new country and so were able to adjust, assimilate, and become a part of the mainstream."

This cultural continuity strengthened the social cohesion among the immigrants, Comer noted, and along with the vote helped them to secure political, economic, and social power — all within a generation. Indeed, opportunities in the society triggered a kind of push pull process. That is, mainstream opportunities *pulled* on families to function well and train their children to take advantage of the opportunities. This, in turn, created a *push* within the families for development and good functioning.

Cultural discontinuity, on the other hand, devastated the lives of blacks wrenched from West Africa's protective and direction-giving governmental and political institutions. Their traumatic enslavement forced them into total dependency on their slavemasters, perpetuated feelings of inadequacy and inferiority, and generally made it impossible for them to create better conditions for themselves, no matter how hard they worked.

A large segment of blacks could not vote until the middle 1960s. With no vote, they could not get political, economic, and social power in society's mainstream.

Nor did blacks have adequate educational opportunities. "As late as the 1940s," Comer continued, "four to eight times as much money was spent on the education of a white child, as opposed to a black child, in the eight states that had 80 percent of the black population. And where it was disproportionately black, the disparity was as great as 25 times. The same disparity existed in higher education."

Predictably, therefore, the black community experienced less of a push/pull process than other communities, according to Comer. While better educated blacks had greater opportunities to qualify for some available jobs after World War II, racism and the absence of political and economic power severely limited these opportunities even for qualified blacks.

University of Chicago sociologist William Julius Wilson described massive structural changes — exacerbated by racism — in the American econ-

omy that crippled the black community in recent years.[1]

Wilson, by studying disaggregated data on the ten largest cities in the United States, has found that growing problems of poverty, joblessness, and welfare dependency have essentially struck the "rust-belt" cities — New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, Cleveland, Indianapolis, and Baltimore. While the job pool increased in sunbelt cities from the late 1950s to the early 1980s, rust-belt employment in manufacturing, retail trade, and wholesale trade declined dramatically, with the biggest change in unemployment rates and labor force participation coming in the 1970s.

"That is when you see the fall-off in labor force participation of black males, particularly among young males," noted economist Margaret Simms of the Joint Center for Political Studies. "That is when you see much higher rates of unemployment relative to the white population. That was not the case during the 1960s when we had very rapid economic expansion. Some of the unemployment lowering came through shipping men off to Viet Nam."

Three decades of decline in rust-belt employment was not balanced by a subsequent expansion of services and moderate increases in entry-level service jobs, Wilson said. Consequently, the urban ghetto poor became more concentrated and socially isolated than ever before.

The exodus of working- and middle-class families from these extreme poverty areas over the past several years left the ghetto poor more vulnerable to the kind of prolonged and increasing joblessness that had plagued inner-city communities since 1970. Without these stable, working-class families, the inner-city's basic institutions were deprived of their leaders, in churches, schools, stores, banks, and so on, removing the mainstream role models that help keep alive perceptions that getting an education is worthwhile. That institutional decline, in turn, weakened formal and informal social controls and contributed to increasing levels of crime, including violent crime, and therefore to the perception that the inner city had become a dangerous place.

Wilson notes that the high concentration of poverty has had significant impact on educational achievement in inner-city schools. Decreasing numbers of middle-class pupils in the student body, with the "cultural capital" that these children bring into the classroom, has served to reduce the chances of academic success of those left behind. A predominance of low-achieving students has undermined teachers' morale and discipline and weakend pupil perceptions of a meaningful relation between education and work and thus

[1] Wilson's book, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (University of Chicago Press, 1987), vividly documents the economic conditions that affect inner-city development.

decreased their academic aspirations, Wilson contended. The local social structure has also become less supportive and demanding of educational achievement. "All of this makes it exceedingly difficult for the schools to compete with other available sources of income and status," the sociologist stated.

Finally, he observed that class changes in the inner city have left a dearth of local businesses, service establishments, and stores profitable enough to offer full-time jobs that would enable a wage earner to rear a family and part-time jobs that would socialize youth into the world of work. More crucially, inner-city residents have become more isolated from the job network that permeates other neighborhoods, explained Wilson. Lacking the kind of informal contacts with employers or workers that are decisive in obtaining employment, they are less likely to learn about openings and obtain available jobs. Hence, drug dealing, stolen goods fencing, and other illegal activities are often the only means by which inner-city teenagers can obtain the income that they and their families need. At an early age, many of them routinely become involved with crime rather than work.

The sometimes "deviant" behavior of inner-city youth reflects their sense of social resignation, Wilson argued. Their low aspirations are responses to perceptions of limited opportunity; their behavior is an adaptation to the grim realities they face.

Wilson's presentation provoked Edward Pitt of the National Urban League to question widespread notions that high aspirations disappear in poor, black communities. Drawing on his experience as a youth worker, he argued that inner-city youths have high aspirations for "the most expensive" — "the very best." Their exposure to upper-class culture through television and advertising makes them want to have what they believe everyone else has. Another conferee suggested that mainstream educational and occupational aspirations would permit inner-city adolescents to lift their sights "beyond leather suits and fancy cars."

What is the Adolescent?

Meeting participants pointed to the need for a more detailed account of the developmental patterns of adolescents that would enable planners to construct relevant programs on their behalf. "There is a data base, which we all have assumed, that tells us what success means in America," declared Robert Johnson of the New Jersey College of Medicine and Dentistry. "We have attempted to fit adolescents into that data base. But we have failed to understand who they are. . . . We have discounted their unique value. In attempting to address their problems, we have refused to build on their

strengths, looked for weaknesses, and decided we have to tear down everything else to build these young persons back up."

In the early stages of adolescence, Johnson explained, young people experience rapid changes in their bodies. Psychologically leaving their families, they test their independence, expand their cognition, relate differently to adults, and form their own subculture or peer group. "They are pretty nice kids at this age," the physician continued. "One morning, however, they reach fourteen."

At this crucial time, mid-adolescents don a suit of armor, a helmet of omniscience enabling them to know everything, a breastplate of omnipotence making them all-powerful, and a shield of invincibility to help them defeat any foe.

"That method of thinking, that suit of armor is the foundation for risk-taking behavior," reported Johnson. "However, it is also the element within the adolescent's life that allows emancipation . . . to take a great deal of risks . . . to use drugs and not think something bad is going to happen . . . to skip school and think [they are] going to graduate . . . to become involved in violent activity and not expect [they are] going to get caught."

During this time, adolescents wrestle a variety of problems as they move more closely to their peer group, which sets standards for behavior, the physician explained. This is also the time when adolescents become sexually active, a time when they are caught up in the tension between can and can't: they *can* make babies, but they *can't* rear them.

"If our programs for black males are going to be successful," Johnson concluded, "it is important to become aware not only of these important developmental issues but also of the necessity of attracting the populations toward whom programs are directed. Once they are attracted, the programs must keep them there . . . [In short], we must develop techniques that allow us to address this sort of behavior and work with adolescents."

What is appropriate for middle-class white teenagers may be inappropriate for black, Hispanic, or Native American teenagers, Gibbs pointed out. In five of six major social indicators, she noted, black youth are worse off than they were in 1960 in spite of civil rights legislation and a generally improved economy. For example, their unemployment in 1988 was three times higher than it was in 1960 (for black youth it is about 34 percent and up to 50 percent in some cities). Nearly half of all black youth eighteen to twenty-four years of age have had no legal work experience.

Gibbs also reported that delinquency rates among blacks have risen; 25 percent of AIDS cases are among blacks; nationally, although the high school dropout rate for blacks has decreased since 1960, many are unable to read or write above the fourth-grade level.

The Self-Definition Struggle

Mark Wade, medical director of a delinquent juvenile center in the Bronx, New York, said that some of the incarcerated teenagers find it difficult to accept that he could possibly be the center's decision maker. He is neither old enough nor white enough, they think. Besides, they have never seen a black in that role.

"Young black boys have a more difficult time defining who they are," Wade commented. "Their identities are more often defined for them. There are fewer role models for them to look at, starting with the definition of what is a good daddy. From the television they watch, a good daddy is one who comes home at five and sits down at the dinner table in a two-parent family. But many of our children are in a situation where daddy demonstrates his love by working two jobs instead of one. So that daddy is not there to help define a meaningful fathership."

Wade reports that most of the adolescents he works with, whose self-esteem would seem to be low, actually feel good about themselves. They see themselves as successful, even though they are in jail, which to them is just a temporary layover until they can return to the activity that boosted their ego.

"It is important to understand who interprets self-esteem," Pitt noted. "The real statistics of what is happening in our community will not be found in general studies because the real studies are not being done. When we use the nationally generalized data, it still does not give us precise information . . . . We have to be careful and use more field-related experiences rather than the national data sets to look at how we analyze and how we prescribe in our programs."

To teenagers who have asked him what was his biggest problem growing up in Harlem, Richard Jordan of the Boys Club of America replied: "Learning to run 100 meters to cover 100 yards. One is longer than the other but the end is the same."

"Kids are wiser now and they really don't buy that," interjected Joy Dryfoos of Columbia University's School of Public Health. "What does it do to the kids to be told that you have to work twice as hard as the person next to you?"

"It makes you angry," Jordan admitted, "but it is a greater risk not to be told." Advocating strategies to reduce the number of adolescents entering prison rather than the mainstream, he warned that they have to learn how to run longer, work harder, and get less for what they deliver.

"What the old black parents communicated was the notion that if it can be done, you got to do it regardless of whether it was fair or not," Comer added.

"The message that you have to work twice as hard to get half as far depends on the integrity and the viability of the messenger," Wade observed. Since role models such as his fellow conferees are not visible to some adolescents, adolescents often mimic less desirable types.

Exploring the role model problem from a different perspective, Johnson cited "Chocolate City," a euphemism for Newark where the mayor, the city council, the school superintendent, most of the school principals and teachers, and the directors of most of the city's hospitals are black. Newark's black adolescents in fact have an abundance of role models. But when they leave their chocolate city to attend college, they abruptly encounter a white society that they are woefully unprepared to copy.

Parental Roles

"The black families who told our generation that you have to work twice as hard to get half as far were far more intact families," Gibbs observed. "The mother and father gave the message and the father was employed, even if he was underemployed. So the kids could see some connection between doing well in school, having a job, and having a family. Today, nearly half of our families are female-headed, and many of them are young. How is that young mother going to give that message to her own kids? How are the kids — very often growing up in a family without a male head — to see the relationship between studying hard and doing well and going out and getting a job when the mother is a welfare dependent?"

As the conferees discussed the issue of parental involvement in adolescent programs, Comer cited the disjuncture that often exists between the cultures of home and school. He was particularly concerned about people outside of society's mainstream who feel they lack the skills to interact with middle-class persons and who feel they are neither liked nor valued.

"A loving relationship with parents doesn't necessarily mean an adolescent can share with them," Johnson contended. "I think it is a mistake to see a lack of parental involvement always as an impediment to development."

"Could children be raised well without parents?" Dryfoos asked.

"Yes!" Comer replied. "But there has to be some caring adult whom the adolescent can make an attaching relationship with."

Comer's two decades of work with public school children in New Haven persuaded Gibbs that programs designed for them cannot be implemented without their parents in the early years because of their centrality in children's lives. "That is who raises them," she said. "That is who talks to them. When the child reaches adolescence, then you are talking about a kid moving away from family and having more autonomy."

Early Childhood and Elementary School Years

Meeting participants discussed elements that distinguish young blacks from young nonblacks. The development of *all* children follows specific cognitive patterns, Margaret Beale Spencer, an Emory University associate professor, pointed out. She summarized social, behavioral, and biological factors that black male children share with other young males.

All children for example, become increasingly more discerning in the ways they engage with their environment. They become more complex in their notions of self and the outside world. Furthermore, all humans share a biologically based need to shape their environment. The feedback they receive from "doing things in the world" gives them a sense of effectiveness — a positive sense of themselves — and thereby helps them to take chances or risks, Spencer explained.

"You try more difficult and complex things because you feel you can make a difference," she continued. "You feel good about what you have done in the past. You grow up feeling you can make a difference. Because black male adolescents do not satisfy that need as readily as white male adolescents, the outcomes of their actions are not as positive as those of whites."

While still in the primary grades, black children shift from natural "Eurocentricity" to "Afrocentricity," becoming aware of their racial group status as early as age three, Spencer reported. For example, they learn stereotypes before understanding their meaning — stereotypes about children, adults, racial groups, the negative connotations associated with the color black and black persons, and the positives associated with the color white and white persons.

As the children become older, their recognition of themselves as black Americans clashes with their Eurocentric stereotypes. The resulting discomfort triggers shifts to Afrocentric beliefs and behavior, and their new positive image of themselves helps them to cope better with their racist environment.

Expressing Racial Pride

Comer asked: "Why do we all stand up and sing 'Lift Ev'ry Voice And Sing' when Doug Williams [Washington Redskins quarterback] performs well?"

"There is a cultural context that we deny," replied Vanella A. Crawford of the Congress of National Black Churches. "Our children see it but are not free to articulate it or integrate it into their lives. When a black male or female surpasses stereotypical limits, we always applaud them. These are societal opportunities to express our racial pride, but we do not give our-

selves permission to stand up and applaud all of our efforts."

"This has been a sexist society," Comer continued. "In a sexist society, who gets the greatest accolades, and who is expected to perform?"

"Black males taking power in society is a very threatening concept," Pitt suggested.

"Given that it is threatening," Comer responded, "what operates on an ongoing basis that black males have to contend with?"

"There is evidence to support the notion that there are conspiracies to undermine the achievement of black males," Pitt argued. "There are institutional procedures and attitudes that amount to barriers. When a Doug Williams breaks through, black men get a collective sense of achievement, and they stand up with great pride and dignity, and so do black women because they were the mothers of those men and they see the possibilities."

Black males, unlike all other males, have a task of forming a racial identity, Johnson declared. "In America, the racial identity for us has been changing. One of the advantages of being in South Carolina in 1946 is that I had an opportunity to go from being colored to being Negro to being black. And those were three different racial identities and also three different ways to express that identity within the standard American culture. When I was in college, I wore a big Afro, and that was an acceptable way to express my blackness at that time."

Defining Success

Crawford addressed the issue of black females completing school before and in greater numbers than black males, offering this as evidence of a "failure syndrome" that hampers males. Her talks with parents of failing school children reveal perceptions of black males that differ from those of black females. "The perception is that black males are going to fail, and they are going to be emotionally disturbed," Crawford reported. "That is not because women are achieving. That is because of a systemic process that promotes failure for black males."

But Johnson reported acquaintance with Newark youngsters who succeed in spite of their deteriorating neighborhoods. Denying familiarity with a "failure syndrome," he insisted that it be defined lest it be dismissed as imaginary. "We are getting into an issue of observation," he argued, "and placing ourselves within a context that we are unfamiliar with and then assuming how we would react in that context and then making the next assumption that everybody has to respond in the same way."

"What causes black women to resist some of the negatives of the society?" Comer asked.

Wade argued that the definition of successful black women differs from that for successful black men — that women are tied more closely with family development and stability than with jobs as is the case with men.

"Success" to adults might mean a big job, Johnson noted, but to an adolescent it might mean joining a basketball team and scoring 35 points.

In any case, black men have to compete with the influx of white women in the labor market, much more so today than in earlier years, according to Wilson.

"Moreover, the perception that the inner cities are more dangerous places than they used to be often translates to mean dangerous young black men," Wilson reported. "When you interview employers who are likely to hire inner-city residents . . . it turns out that black males are ranked at the bottom because they are perceived as a threat, and employers prefer not to take a chance with them."

However, not just young black men are perceived as dangerous, recalled Comer. When Comer recently stepped out of an elevator near dusk at his child training center in New Haven, a white woman who had been waiting to enter turned and ran.

Broad Strategies

Challenged by the galaxy of problems that revolve around black male adolescents, Gibbs proposed several broad strategies to attack underlying causes rather than merely symptoms. "Family support policies, enabling families to remain together and function more effectively, would be the most effective point of intervention," she declared. "The policies would have to involve child care, education and training programs, particularly for young mothers lacking employable skills."

Gibbs believes various levels of government should do more about low-income housing. Advocating a full employment-policy (including special programs for black youth), she called for dropout prevention programs in the public schools, funds for compensatory education, better administrative leadership of the schools, and better teacher recruitment, education, and training. The social scientist contends that the general health care system needs to be completely overhauled and urged better sex education and sexual responsibility among black males. Finally, Gibbs urged gun control legislation to reduce black-on-black crime.

Believing these are strategies that government should implement, Gibbs also proposed engagement between inner-city blacks and significant black role models to generate a greater sense of racial responsibility among middle-class blacks. Responding to Gibbs's advocacy of school-based clinics, John-

son noted that fewer than 100 exist in the nation and none of the studies of them has been completed as yet.

"The point that is important," he said, "is that a young person does not divide into a part that is substance abuse and a part that is pregnancy and a part that is school dropout. If a young person has a problem and presents himself to a helping structure, then it is the responsibility of the helping structure to develop a diagnostic process that will look carefully at the adolescent's entire life and develop a helping program for that adolescent."

Examples of Effective Interventions

Mercer Sullivan of the Vera Institute of Justice in New York notes that the structural and economic deterioration of the inner cities is so massive that it is creating enormous problems — problems that field workers cannot solve only with programs. "This puts us in a double bind," he declared. "On the one hand, it is easy to throw up our hands and say, 'Well we can't do anything. We have to change the whole society or the whole economy before we can effect any change.' I don't think that is true. On the other hand, it is not fair to expect these programs in a short space of time to undo all that damage."

Tentative conclusions were reached about effective intervention programs surveyed by Dryfoos: 1) intervention must be early in a child's life; 2) programs have to be multidimensional, intensive, and long-term; 3) there must be one-on-one, individual counseling; 4) staffers must have high expectations for the adolescents; 5) adolescents need positive role models; 6) programs must be either school based or have some relationship to school experience, and 7) there needs to be teaching of social skills.

The Yale Child Study Center School Development Program that Comer introduced in three elementary schools in New Haven during the late 1960s and 1970s is now expanding throughout the city's school system at a rate of two or three schools per year. The program is also taking hold in Benton Harbor, Michigan, and Stamford, Connecticut.

The program addresses the reality that the families of children from society's lowest socioeconomic strata experience more stress than do other families. A disproportionate number of their children are not prepared for school when they enter or do not have skills that are functional for school success.

When children are unable to meet their schools' expectations, they are viewed as bad or as children with low ability. There is a clash and then a downward spiral for the children, the teachers, the school — indeed for everyone involved.

"Most teachers have not had child development training," Comer pointed out. "And even if they have, it has been in the abstract and not in the applied. Therefore they do not know how to respond to the children's behavior."

Secondly, the teachers, untrained in managing the system they work in, have often only been taught methods of passing on information, Comer explained. They are not equipped to help manage the system and create a desirable school climate.

Thirdly, teachers have never really been taught how to deal with parents and people in the community and the kinds of interactions necessary for gaining support for a school program.

"We created the governance and management group that brought parents, administrators, and teachers together to recreate a consensus about what was right and wrong, good and bad, and what everyone wanted the school to accomplish," Comer recalled. "The result is that everybody has had an opportunity to influence the management of the school."

Comer's program permits low-income, disproportionately high-risk children to gain some of the same skills that children from better educated and higher income families often gain simply by participating in the affairs of their families.

As Deputy Director of Programs for the Boston City Hospitals, Renee Wilson came to the meeting representing Deborah Prothrow-Stith, Commissioner of the Department of Public Health for the State of Massachusetts. "Out only focus right now is violence prevention," Wilson declared. "While we're talking about health promotion, if we can't keep them alive there really is nothing to promote.

"The program deals with primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention. There is a school-based program, a community-based program, a hospital-based program, and a program at the Barrens Assessment Center where adolescents are taken if they are caught in the public schools with weapons."

Wilson explained that all of this work evolved out of a violence-prevention curriculum for adolescents that Prothrow-Stith had developed for the schools. As a Harvard Medical School intern in the emergency room at Boston City Hospital, she was tending a young man who had been admitted with a stab wound. She was attempting to suture him when he said: "You just wait 'til I get out of here. You're going to get a lot more practice, because the guy who did this to me is going to be in here next."

Prothrow-Stith finished with her patient but never stopped thinking about the inadequacy of the health care system. If the young man had attempted suicide, then said, "You just wait 'til I get out of here. I'm going to try it again," mechanisms would have been in place to deal with him. Not so for

homicide. It was not considered a public health problem. The young doctor developed her own homicide/suicide/violence prevention curriculum and started presenting it to the Boston schools.

"You have a violence prevention curriculum for the schools," Wilson noted. "What about the community? The community-based program deals with adolescents in Roxbury [a predominately black area with the city's highest homicide rate] and South Boston [a predominately white area with the most rapidly increasing adolescent homicide rate]."

The program takes violence prevention concepts from the curriculum and presents them to the adolescents, letting them realize the risks of homicide, then come to their own conclusions about the need to find alternatives to violence and also to develop some conflict resolution skills.

"The hospital-based program," Wilson continued, "is for adolescents who have already been admitted for a violent crime. They usually know the perpetrator. We are trying to counsel these adolescents and bring their parents and other people they are in most contact with together so that they don't come back again."

"The Door," established in 1972, is an effort to do something for the street kids in New York, Johnson reported. Its services range from legal to social services to psychiatric services to nutrition. The Door also has a canteen where adolescents can work, a cafeteria, a medical center, an educational center, a vocational training center, and a creative workshop that runs the gamut from weightlifting to basketball to ballet to woodwork to calligraphy, jewelry making, and gymnastics.

"Young people come into The Door for one of these services," Johnson continued. "That is the hook, the thing that gets them in. But in order to become involved in any service, they have to go through a diagnostic process that allows us to determine what other services they will need. For all services, they must have a medical evaluation. Once they go through that process, a treatment plan is formed. It includes one or a whole variety of services coordinated through the use of teams of individuals from each of those service components. One of the most important aspects of The Door is internal evaluation, which is used to modify the programs, train staff, and create new programs."

Crawford, who directs Project SPIRIT for the Congress of National Black Churches, described it as an after-school tutorial, parent-training, and pastoral counseling program. Primarily it provides for latch-key children or those in need of special academic and nurturing intervention.

They come to one of the total of fifteen sites in three cities — Oakland, Atlanta, and Indianapolis. In the five churches at each site, about twenty children per church spend about three and one-half hours every evening in

academic enrichment programs and learn living skills that show them how to negotiate through their environment.

The Black Family Roundtable in New Haven, led by the local NAACP and Urban League, draws from all of the city's black leaders, including the superintendent of schools and the school board chairman, according to Comer. Focusing on youth, the Roundtable has started a boy scout troop and a number of other activities in which the black community can transmit to adolescents its interpretation of the black experience and what the community wants for its youth. "The question still remains," says Comer: "How do you get middle-income, mainstream black families connected to low-income black families who feel alienated? This is the strategy we're using."

"We have street academies in California that are being replicated in other states," Gibbs reported. "These are for school dropouts. They are funded in some places by private industry councils, in some places by the Urban League, and in other places by the Urban Coalition. The point is you really can't deal with the kinds of psychosocial problems that black youths have without tying these to education, training, and counseling."

Conclusion

Acutely aware of the disproportionate deaths, dismal academic performances, and depressed unemployment rates of too many of the inner city's male children, the participants generally cited poverty, racism, family disintegration, and community disorganization as major reasons why black youths are worse off today than in 1960 — in spite of civil rights legislation and a healthier U.S. economy.

Chairman Comer located some of the causes in 1) the traumatic social history of blacks, 2) major changes in technology and the economy, and 3) adaptive mechanisms which, available to other immigrants but unavailable to blacks, facilitated immigrant cultural continuity and social cohesion.

Wilson analyzed mega-changes in the American economy, which — exacerbated by racism — intensified poverty, joblessness, and welfare dependency in the black community and rendered it more socially isolated than ever before. Sullivan noted that the structural and economic deterioration of the inner cities is so massive that despairing field workers may conclude that no reform is possible without radically altering the entire society. He cautioned, however, that, while programs could effect change, it was unreasonable to expect reform programs rapidly to undo massive damage.

Meanwhile, Johnson lamented the failure of adults to understand adolescents, ignoring adolescent strengths while dwelling on their weaknesses. His acquaintance with Newark youths who succeed in spite of their deteriorating

neighborhoods prompted Johnson to question allegations of a "failure syndrome" — a widespread systemic process that promotes failure for black males.

Wade noted the difficulty that black boys have in defining themselves, since they often are obliged to fit into the definitions of others. Furthermore, when black males defy these definitions and seek power in society, they are perceived as threats, according to Pitt.

Meanwhile, the participants addressed social, behavioral, and biological factors that black youth share or do not share with all other adolescent males — commonalities or differences that may have implications for public policymaking in addressing the problems of black males.

Comer returned to the perplexing question raised by Jordan who had said: "We know a great deal. We have done a great deal of research. We know what the problems are. We know what the history is. Given that we know all of this, why are we still missing the mark? What we have been doing up to this point in our society has not worked effectively for the group that we have come here to talk about.

"How do we take our combined knowledge and experience and develop some type of mechanism to deal with early intervention? The children out here cannot wait for us to change the social order, the economic climate, the political processes of the society, because they will grow in spite of us. What little step can we take now, that have not been taken before?"

"Let me be provocative," Comer pleaded. "I don't think most Americans care whether low-income black kids are successful or not. They see no relationship between the problems and what happens to them and what happens to the country. As long as that is the case, we will have trouble getting the kinds of legislation, programs, and services in this area that make a difference."

Appendix A: Agenda

YOUNG BLACK MALES IN JEOPARDY: RISK FACTORS AND INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

Thursday, February 11, 1988

9:00- 9:30 Coffee

9:30- 9:45 Introduction — David A. Hamburg, M.D., President, Carnegie Corporation of New York

9:45-10:15 James P. Comer, M.D.: The Condition of Black Families and Children

10:15-10:45 Discussion

10:45-12:30 *Early Childhood and Elementary School Years* — What are the developmental tasks of these age periods? What does current research reveal about which tasks are being accomplished well by boys? What can be done in the preschool and elementary school years to promote healthier development?
Presenter: Margaret Spencer

12:30- 1:15 Lunch

1:15- 2:45 *Adolescent Development and Problems* — What are the strategies being taken to reduce the problems encountered by young black male adolescents? What do we know about their effectiveness?
Presenters: Robert Johnson, M.D., and Jewelle Taylor Gibbs

2:45- 3:00 Break

3:00- 4:00 *How Institutions Should Respond*
— Schools
— Churches and other organizations in black community
— Youth Serving Organizations
— Economic Development Agencies
— Funding Sources

Appendix B: List of Participants

Sharon Adams-Taylor
Children's Defense Fund

James P. Comer, M.D.
Maurice Falk Professor of
Child Psychiatry
Yale Child Study Center
Associate Dean
Yale Medical School

Vanella A. Crawford
Project Director
Congress of National Black
Churches

George Curry
Chicago Tribune
Washington Bureau

Jimmy Dotson
Sergeant
Houston Police Department

Joy Dryfoos
School of Public Health
Columbia University

Felton Earles, M.D.
Professor of Child Psychiatry
Department of Psychiatry
Washington University
of Medicine

Vivian Manning Fox
Managing Director
Private Industry Council

Jewelle Taylor Gibbs
Associate Professor
University of California
School of Social Welfare

Marion Howard, M.D.
Grady Memorial Hospital

Gerald Jaynes
Department of Economics
Yale University

Robert Johnson, M.D.
N.J. College of Medicine
& Dentistry
N.J. Medical School
Department of Pediatrics

Judith Jones
Director
National Resource Center for
Children in Poverty
Columbia University

Richard Jordan
Director
National Urban Services
Boys Club of America

Valeria Lovelace
Director of Research
Children's Television Workshop

Mora McLean
Program Officer
Ford Foundation

Ernest McMillan
Fifth Ward Enrichment Program
Houston

Velmanette Montgomery
Senatorial District
Brooklyn

Delores Parron
Associate Director for Special Populations
National Institute of Mental Health

Linda Pickett
Vice President for Program
William T. Grant Foundation

Edward Pitt
National Urban League

Beny Primm, M.D.
President
Urban Resource Institute

Margaret Simms
Joint Center for Political Studies

Margaret Beale Spencer
Associate Professor
Emory University

Mercer Sullivan
Vera Institute of Justice

Mark Wade, M.D.
Medical Director
Montifiore Health Services
Spofford Juvenile Center

Renee Wilson
Violence Prevention Project
Department of Health and Hospitals
State of Massachusetts

William Julius Wilson
Department of Sociology
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David A. Hamburg, M.D.
President

Barbara D. Finberg
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Elena O. Nightingale, M.D.
Special Advisor to the President

Bernard Charles
Program Officer

Vivien Stewart
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Avery Russell
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Gloria Primm Brown
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Sheila Smith
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